

Torgau 2005

Russian, U.S. armies serve, train together

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Exercise Torgau 2005 May 23 to June 3 more than 400 Soldiers from the U.S. Army's 1st AD and the Russian 4th AD trained together at the Russian Combined Arms Academy and the Solnechhogorsk Training Area in the Russian Federation and at the Grafenwöhr Training Area. The Soldiers also had a chance to share in sports and cultural events.

Named after the German town on the Elbe River where Russian and American armies linked up in final days of the war in Europe during World War II, Exercise Torgau marked the first time front-line Soldiers trained together in a field setting, according to 1st AD officials.

"I think it's been a positive experience and a good chance to work with them and them to work with us," said Staff Sgt. Craig Meads, Company A, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment, based in Baumholder. "It helps build a good relationship between the two countries and build respect. Going into this I was very positive and really looking forward to it. Not too often do you get an opportunity to do something like this. Also it was very positive for our two countries."

"This training is very important so that we will know how to work together

with our American friends in a real battle," said Russian Artillery Academy cadet S e r g e i Chimilkin during live-fire training with members of the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment in Grafenwöhr June 2. "These exercises will help us with our partnerships in the future.

"The American sergeants and Soldiers working with us have very high skills and standards," Chimilkin added. "Also training with the Paladin was very good."

For some U.S. Soldiers it wasn't their first experience cooperating

with Russian troops.

"I worked with Russians in Kosovo," said Sgt. Kris Westergard of Battery A, 4-27th FA. "I know how they act and their willingness to learn. I wish that I could've gone to Russia."

"My only expectation about going to Russia was the weather – I thought it would be a lot colder, but it was nice," said Staff Sgt. Harvey Cornelius of Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery. "It was a pretty good experience all around.

"The Russians stayed in the same billeting as us," said Cornelius, who explained that in the evenings and during breaks in training, U.S. and Russian Soldiers had a chance to learn more about each others countries and cultures. "We communicated mostly with body language and traded patches and things with them. A good bond was formed between the two armies."

In Grafenwöhr Cornelius and other members of the Giessen-based unit helped answer questions the Russian cadets had after working with the American howitzers.

"If I had a chance to do it again I would," Cornelius said.

"I don't think everyone was so excited coming into this, but once they met the Russians they really enjoyed it," said Capt.

Dan Cohen, a platoon leader with Battery A, 4-27th FA from Baumholder, explaining that the cultural exchange was as rewarding as

the training. "I think it's been really interesting. I don't think I'd ever seen a Russian colonel come out to my fire point. It was also interesting to trade stories. They were very interested in our experiences in Iraq. I think the cultural exchange was more important than the training itself.

"It was also important for

the Soldiers of both nations to recognize that Soldiers are people the world over. They're real people just like us," said Cohen. "Their uniforms and weapons may be different, but they're just people. They like the same rock and roll music as we do. They swapped Metallica concert stories."

"This is the second time I've worked with a Russian crew," said Spc. Matthew Pratt of Company A, 1-35th Armor, explaining that he trained in Sardinia in 1996 with Russian Soldiers while serving as a U.S. marine. "It's always a joy to see their eyes light up when they see what we and our equipment can do."

Pratt said his perceptions have changed since then. "I had a different experience back then because I thought they would be proud of their equipment and look down on our equipment. But I found they were real eager to learn. They are real fun to work with."

"This has been an experience for me on a totally different level," said Sgt. Ronnie Groves, Company A, 1-35th Armor, adding that he is married to a Russian. "From Hollywood you get this impression that Russians are cold, but in reality the people are warm-hearted and eager to learn. That was one of the things that excited me about this. I understand a little bit of Russian myself."

The cultural exchanges were just as vital as the training, Groves said. "In between missions and shooting bullets, the Russian and American Soldiers talked about American and Russian life. It was very good for international relations."

"We got a lot of chances to hang out with the Russian Soldiers," said Spc. Douglas Henderson of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, describing his experience in the Russian Federation. "We also had time to spend about an hour and a half in Moscow. It was a lot of fun.

"I expected it to be a lot more



Russian Soldiers instruct 1st Armored Division tankers from Friedberg's 1st Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment, on how to operate the Russian T-72 tank at the Vystrel Training Center in the Russian Federation before letting the Americans take the tank for a test drive.

run down than it was," said Henderson, "but it was pretty nice."

"They had a lot better equipment than I thought they'd have," he said, describing the RPKs, AK-47s, BTR-80s, BMP2s and other military gear the Americans had a chance to work with.

"It was very interesting," said Spc. Harold Perez, Company A, 4-27th FA. "I think everyone should go through it — just for the training.

"If you don't practice, you don't perform well," said the Baumholder-based Soldier.

"Working with the Russians has been so far, so good," said Perez.

"It's great how willing to learn they are," said Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Hurst, 1-35th Armor. "They asked some pretty smart questions.

"The training aspect is what allows us to draw closer," said Hurst, praising the interaction and

chance to learn about each other's cultures. "I think it's a good opportunity for the young Soldiers who have to deal with Soldiers from other countries. They come out here and see another country — another culture. It's a chance to find some common ground."

Hurst added that sharing jokes with the Russian Soldiers was another bonus.

"The most important thing here is Soldiers working with Soldiers," said Capt. Chris Kuzio, commander of Company A, 1-6th Infantry, and commander of the U.S. Company Team for Exercise Torgau. "The amazing thing to see is how similar all our guys are. They all get excited about the same things and complain about the same things."

"I found some real friends among the American Soldiers," added Russian cadet Semyon Kuzmin. (Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow of the 1st AD Public Affairs Office contributed to this story.)



Photo by Karl Weisel



Photo by Karl Weisel
A 1-35th Armor Abrams tank rolls through the Grafenwöhr Training Area during Exercise Torgau 2005. Below and left: U.S. and Russian Soldiers train on the small arms range.



Photo by Karl Weisel



Photo by Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow

Sgt. Leslie Guy instructs Russian cadets on how to direct howitzer fire inside an M577 tracked command post at the Grafenwöhr Training Area.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Cpl. Cory Alexander, Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, Baumholder, shows a Russian cadet around a Bradley fighting vehicle during training at the Grafenwöhr Training Area June 2.



Photo by Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow

A Russian cadet ducks "enemy fire" during training in Grafenwöhr.